

**A Pending Invitation**

COMMUNION

PEACE

December 1, 2019

**Isaiah 2: 1-5**

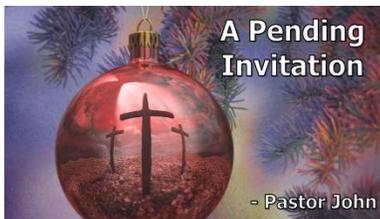
*<sup>1</sup> The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. <sup>3</sup> Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. <sup>5</sup> O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!*

**Romans 13: 11-14**

*<sup>11</sup> Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup> the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; <sup>13</sup> let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

## Ephesians 4: 1-6

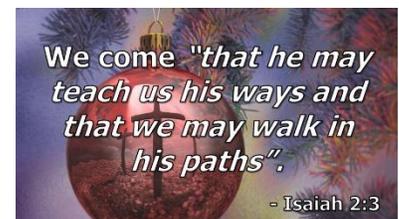
*<sup>1</sup> I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*



Today, as we begin our Advent sermon series, let us begin to lean into this time of preparation and anticipation with hearts and minds dedicated to being fully present to the coming of Christ – both into our hearts and into the world.

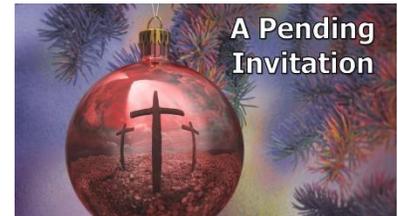
Let us pray...

Our first passage this morning comes from the book of Isaiah. Please open your Bibles to chapter 2 as we begin this morning. In this passage, the prophet Isaiah issues an invitation. He calls the people to the house of the Lord. We came and indeed many people all over the world will come to houses of the Lord today. Isaiah called the people for specific reasons. In verse three we read of his reasons: *"that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths"*. We come for these same reasons. We come to learn about and to grow more like God and Jesus Christ. But there is also an "already but not yet" to today's passage. In verse four we are reminded that God will go to great lengths to dismantle and repair God's broken creation.



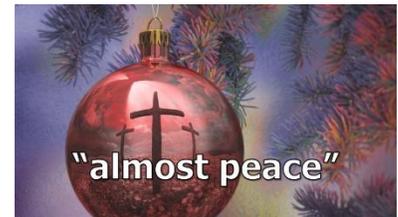
Verse four is a reminder that God desires peace, not war. It is also a promise that one day God will lead humanity to beat our swords into ploughs and spears into pruning hooks. The passage from Isaiah looks forward to a day and place where God's kingdom is fully realized. One day, in peace and righteousness, God will reign from his holy mountain. Our Advent invitation calls us to look forward to that day with anticipation and preparation, with a joyful expectancy.

But we are not there yet. We are not yet on God's holy mountain. Yet the pending invitation awaits. Today we are but at the first signpost on the road to our



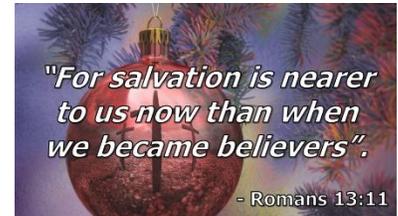
destination. This morning we lit the candle of peace. We desire peace. We know it is coming. But we must also acknowledge that at times it feels a long way off. Many people often live with an "almost peace".

We read headlines that speak of another flare-up, another deadly shooting, another violent storm and peace seems distant. Even in our own hearts many of

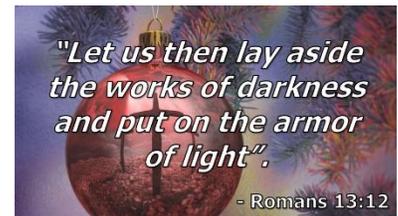


us wrestle with an unsure future, with inner conflicts, with sin. Some people in our churches are stuck in deep valleys of sorrow and grief and loss. Some people wend their ways along winding paths lined with anxiety or depression or doubt or fear. Some people walk in circles, trying to discern how to move forward, how to find meaning and purpose in their lives. In times such as these, we can become so focused on our immediate surroundings and struggles that we lose sight of the promises and love of God. When we find ourselves there, we live with an "almost peace". This is not the peace that God desires for us.

Turning to Romans 13, we find some encouragement in these words from Paul. As we do, I invite you to flip forward in your Bibles to the thirteenth chapter in the sixth book in the New Testament. In Romans 13, in verse 11, Paul begins by encouraging us to wake from our sleep. Continuing in verse 11, we hear the 'why' we should awake. Read with me why we should seek an "altogether peace" in our lives: *"For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers"*. Knowing our place in God's family, knowing the promise of life eternal through faith in Jesus Christ, we can trust that today we are one day closer to heaven than we were when we first believed. This too is an "already but not yet" component of our faith. It brings us peace as we look forward to the future. Paul gives us hope too as he goes on to remind us that *"the night is far gone, the day is near"*. Yes, the day of Jesus' return is closer today than it has ever been.



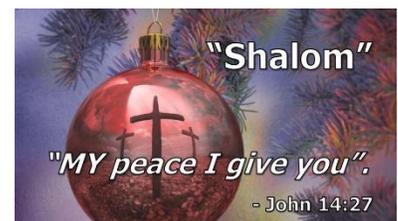
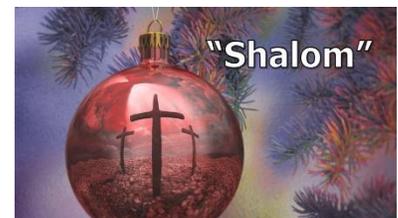
In the remainder of verse 12, Paul exhorts us, proclaiming, *"Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light"*. Here Paul



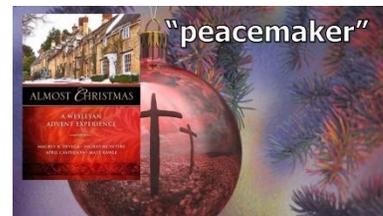
echoes Isaiah's challenge that we heard earlier, the call to *"walk in the light of the Lord"*! The idea of armor has two meanings here. In Ephesians 6 Paul writes of putting on the whole armor of God. In this analogy, the armor of God defends us from *"the wiles of the devil"*. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the rest of the armor allows us to stand firm in our faith. That analogy applies here to Paul's words too. Light drives away the darkness. Light guides our paths to walk honorably, to walk as Christ walked.

Scholars believe that Paul drew this armor analogy from the Roman soldier guarding him when he was under house arrest. This real armor would have had a different meaning to Paul and his contemporaries. In the ancient world, peace came through the Romans. But this peace, the "Pax Romana", was not the peace that Jesus brought and continues to bring. It is not the peace that Isaiah describes – the peace that God will one day establish. The Roman peace came through power. It was a peace forged by oppression, violence, death, threats. There was no presence of justice or equality; there was no wholeness of life. We too can live this type of peace in our lives. When we do, we live an "almost peace". We can put up walls. We can force our emotions deep down. We can say we are okay when we are far from being okay. We can put on a good face and try to fake our way through. We have all been there.

Our Advent study contrasts these types of "peace" with a real and altogether peace. It is the peace that Christ seeks to fill our hearts with. Jesus and the other rabbis of the day sought to help people to live with *shalom*. Shalom entailed being complete, being fully healthy. Shalom envisioned a whole and complete restoration of all of creation – a fullness of health and prosperity for oneself and for others. This is the peace Jesus speaks of in John 14:27, where he says, "*MY peace I give you*". This was the peace that was the calm in the storm, was peace and patience in times of confrontation, was peace and strength in the face of death, was peace in all of life and in all relationships.

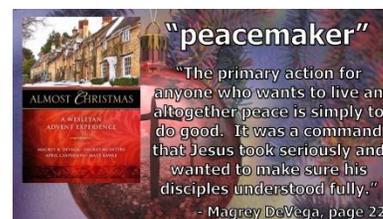


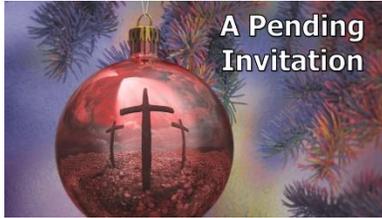
Author Magrey DeVega connects this idea of shalom peace with John Wesley's rule of life to "Do good" in chapter one of our Advent study book. Drawing upon Jesus' admonition from the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5 to be peacemakers, Wesley sought to be and to encouraged others to be peacemakers. Reading from the top of page 21, hear Wesley's understanding of how to answer Jesus' call:



*"But in the full extent of the word, a peacemaker is one that, as he hath opportunity, "doth good unto all men;" one that, being filled with the love of God and of all mankind, cannot confine the expressions of it to his own family, or friends, or acquaintance, or party, or to those of his own opinions; — no, nor those who are partakers of like precious faith; but steps over all these narrow bounds, that he may do good to every man, that he may, some way or other, manifest his love to neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. He doth good to them all, as he hath opportunity, that is, on every possible occasion.*

Wesley believed that as followers of Christ we must invest all "faculties of body, soul, fortune, interest, and reputation" in doing good for others. Wesley taught that we experience an altogether peace only when we commit to doing good "all the time, in every way, with all that we have, until the very end". DeVega writes, *"The primary action for anyone who wants to live an altogether peace is simply to do good. It was a command that Jesus took seriously and wanted to make sure his disciples understood fully".* It is a command that we too must take seriously and understand well if we want to be "altogether Christians" and if we want to experience an altogether peace in our lives.

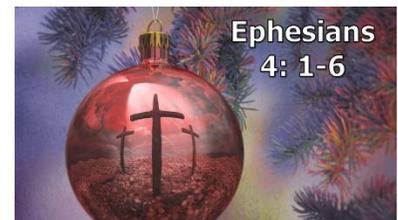




Turning to Ephesians 4, we hear Paul's radical call to living a life of peace. This too is a pending invitation. As has been our habit, I invite you to turn to Ephesians 4 in your Bible. Paul is writing while held in chains.

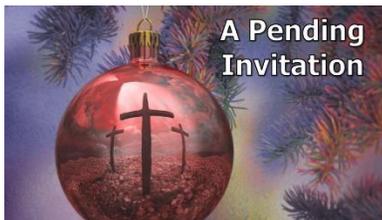
That Paul has altogether peace in his situation is a testament to his faith. He writes to encourage the Christians living in this worldly city within a secular empire. If this scenario sounds familiar, hear these words from the introduction to Ephesians: *"The stark problem for the early Christians was that their allegiance was not to Rome and its Caesar, but to the kingdom of heaven and its God. If the gospel were going to mean anything at all, it had to mean something in Ephesus... Spiritual formation is a geographical as well as theological phenomenon"*. We live in a secular world. The problem remains the same. We have only replaced Rome and Caesar with Hollywood and Las Vegas and Nashville and their stars, vices, and other wiles of Satan.

From that context, hear Paul's words to those early Christians. I will be reading verses one through six:



*<sup>1</sup> I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

Paul begs us to live a life worthy of the calling that we have received and have accepted from Jesus Christ. That life is marked by humility and gentleness and patience. A life worthy of the calling invites us to bear with one another and to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This bond calls us to be one with each another and one with God. We are called to "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*". We are called into community.



It is through community that we are reminded that God's peace and presence are right here. When tragedy strikes and the grief feels overwhelming, it is community that gathers to hold peace together. While this is true in the deepest valleys, we too often live a surface level peace. True peace comes in knowing that God is with us in all ways and in all places. Today, we gather at this communion table as a community of faith. Our "already but not yet" faith is bound up in this table of grace. We can come freely to this table, feasting on forgiveness and grace. The price for us was paid about 2,000 years ago. That has already happened. Because the price was paid, we can be made new. That is what we are invited to experience at this table. There is also a "not yet" aspect. This table is but a foretaste of the banquet feast that we will partake of in heaven. The bread and the juice are but a taste of the glories of heaven. Today, the table is set. Jesus calls us to confess of our sins, to repent, and to be made righteous again as his blood washes us clean. As we do come forward and allow the bread and juice to be for us the body and blood of Christ, we know that we will be made new, once again accepting Isaiah's pending invitation to "*walk in the light of the LORD*"! Thanks be to God. Amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve:**

- 1) Grow. Jesus calls us to a "shalom peace". How can deepening your faith lead you to this idea of fullness of health and prosperity for yourself and others?
- 2) Pray. In prayer this week, how can you take upon yourself "the armor of light" that Paul speaks of in Romans 13?
- 3) Serve. "The primary action for anyone who wants to live an altogether peace is simply to do good". Where can you do good this week?